

RUSSIA SUFFERS FROM EPIDEMIC OF PLAGUES

By Patrick Quinland.
(Written for the United Press.)
NEW YORK, April 22.—Every war carries virulent diseases in its wake and the recent war brought into soviet Russia a number of epidemics which took root instantly, because of unsanitary conditions and the lack of proper food. One epidemic came close upon the heels of another and Russia was caught in the grip of cholera, Spanish influenza and the typhus plague.

Properly speaking, the typhus epidemic began in the fall of 1918 and reached its climax in the spring of 1919. Over a period lasting less than ten months the total number of typhus cases registered was 1,299,263, of which between eight and 10 percent ended fatally. In the cities, where the food situation was particularly acute, the scourge spread most rapidly and proved most disastrous.

During the summer months a marked decline was visible in the number of typhus cases registered with the People's Commissariat of Health. The disease received a new lease of life in the winter months, when the soviet army advanced into Siberia, where the scourge had taken deep hold. When the epidemic had practically disappeared in the East, it began to crop up in the south. Other epidemics marched along-side the soviet army, such as small-pox and typhoid fever. These had to be met, as well as typhus, and the soviet government, with wretchedly limited means at its command, set bravely to rid the country of devastating diseases.

The People's Commissariat of Health is under the expert direction of Dr. N. H. Semashko and represents a fusion of all medical services in the country. Previously, during the Kerensky regime, there existed several independent organizations functioning along their own lines and often duplicating or working at cross purposes. These were united into a single independent body which is called the People's Commissariat of Health. While other governments are still discussing the advisability of establishing a department of health, soviet Russia is the first country to have actually done it. This commissariat operates in outlying districts through local branches assisted by workers' and peasants' committees. For example, all through the typhus epidemic these committees undertook to inspect the baths, the supply of soap, the sanitary condition of the houses and public institutions as well as to spread by word of mouth correct information and advice on questions of hygiene. The committees were formed in all important districts in the large cities.

The stamping out of typhus, according to the reports of the commissariat, is in large part due to the activities of workers' and peasants' committees. Labor in the factories has

been protected by sanitary measures; motherhood and childhood have been the first care of the state; hospitals were opened free of charge to members of all classes. In the latter there are about 500,000 beds for persons suffering from epidemics. The ambulances and the medicaments are free. All drug stores have been nationalized and medical supplies are distributed in a fair and systematic manner.

A word must be said for the preventorium and general therapeutic work. There are at present four district organizations engaged in physio-mechanical-therapeutic work, and suspects are compelled to attend these and remain under observation until pronounced in good health by the doctors.

During the war, owing to the extreme lack of medical supplies, the People's Commissariat of Health was compelled to resort to the most primitive methods to combat typhus. Not

only did the country suffer from a shortage of medicines, but there were not enough doctors and nurses to meet the needs of the people. One measure employed turned out to be quite effective. The government equipped a Health Propaganda train and sent it through the country carrying men and women speakers, who explained to the ignorant peasant and careless town-dweller the simple measures of personal hygiene. Great lurid posters were pasted on the carriages of the train shouting advice.

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